

# Battery Dance Company and Drastic Action present

## Dances for The Blue House

Two New York dance companies celebrate the activism of a German community commemorating its Jewish legacy with performances and educational workshops.

July 19- August 6th, 2006

Breisach, Germany

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Contact: Peggy Coleman, (212) 219-3910**

New York, NY, May 1, 2006 -- Two New York dance companies, Battery Dance Company and Drastic Action, will lead a nineteen-day program in Germany focusing on the legacy of the Holocaust. This project has been developed in collaboration with the Blue House Association in Breisach, a small town in Southern Germany. Through educational workshops, performances, and the creation of a new dance piece, the Dances for The Blue House project will draw together a broad cross section of Germans and Americans, Jews and Gentiles, students and adults in an exchange aimed to foster mutual understanding.

Dances for the Blue House will stimulate dialogue around the potent issues raised by the 400-year long history of Breisach's Jewish community, which ended with the deportation of the Jews of the region in October, 1940. The two performing companies are working in close collaboration with Dr. Christiane Walesch-Schneller, the founder of the Förderverein Ehemaliges Jüdisches Gemeindehaus Breisach (Blue House Association) in Breisach. This grass-roots organization is commemorating the town's Jewish heritage through the purchase and restoration of the former Jewish Community Center, The Blue House, and transforming it into a memorial and center for learning. Over the past seven years the Förderverein has facilitated the return of numerous Jewish survivors of the town and their descendants to connect with current residents.

Dances for the Blue House will begin with workshops taught by Battery Dance Company and Drastic Action for 100 students in three secondary schools in the neighboring City of Freiburg. Three history teachers have been partners in organizing these teaching residencies which will use dance as a tool to explore personal identity. The project will continue in Breisach where Geismar will create a site-specific piece for the ten dancers of both companies. The project will culminate with a weekend of performances and workshops in Breisach, August 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup>.

Visitors from all over the US and Europe, including survivors of the town's Jewish community and their children and grandchildren, are planning to attend.

### **DANCES FOR THE BLUE HOUSE PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES**

On Thursday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> through Sunday August 6<sup>th</sup>, Dances for the Blue House performances will enliven the streets and historic amphitheater of Breisach.

Site-Specific Piece: Each night's events will begin at 6:30 p.m. with Geismar's site-specific piece. Performers will lead viewers from the site of the destroyed synagogue, up the former Jüdinggass, (Jewish Street), past the home of Geismar's great-grandparents where colorful banners will unfurl from the windows. Playful games will be interrupted by base behavior. A game of patty cake will turn menacing as the dancers lead the audience through the Blue House and up the hill to the Festspiele, the town's amphitheater.

Concert Programs: At 8:30 p.m., following a reception, the companies will present a program of four dances that explore issues raised by the history of the Holocaust. The two solos and two quartets on the program explore such issues as group dynamics, victimization, the collapse of social systems and the preservation of cultural history. The students from the three Freiburg high schools will also perform short dances created under the guidance of the companies' teaching artists during the workshops. The program of events will be completed with a concert on Sunday, August 6<sup>th</sup>, at 11:30 a.m. by The Chagall Quartet, a string ensemble whose repertoire includes music composed by prisoners of the concentration camps.

Special Activities: The Israeli psychotherapist, Professor Dan Bar-On, who has done extensive work to bring about healing with children of survivors and children of Nazis, will be in Breisach for the final week of events. He will be joined by Deena Harris, MD, a psychoanalyst from New York, and Renate Roeder,

an educator from Cologne, who have worked together with Professor Bar-On in the group To Reflect & Trust (TRT) since 1992. They have participated in and facilitated groups aimed at enhancing understanding, communication and dialogue with Germans, Jews, Northern Irish, South Africans, Israelis and Palestinians. At the Blue House they will lead workshops emphasizing the use of storytelling to work through conflict for interested visitors and residents.

## **THE DANCE WORKS**

The program of dances at the Festspiele will include four works:

· Secrets of the Paving Stones, Battery Dance Company. This piece was inspired by its powerfully evocative score by the Craków Klezmer Band and a ten-day workshop in Kraków's Kaszimirz district, home of the city's Jewish population from ancient times until WWII. Secrets portrays the historic changes of the human spirit to which the cobbled streets of Kraków have borne witness.

§ Between Heaven and Earth, Battery Dance Company, was created for the European Conference on Tolerance, and set to another score by the Craków Klezmer Band, draws on West Indian dancer Sean Scantlebury's primal energy to create a celebratory counterpoint to the subtleties of Secrets.

§ All Fall Down, Drastic Action, is an absurdist exploration of group dynamics, betrayal and the ambiguity of interpersonal relationships. With stomping rhythmical riffs and haughty feminine gestures, four women vie for power and attention. Annabelle Chvostek's score creates a surreal landscape in which slippery alliances form and reform and their play veers dangerously out of control.

§ The Unbidden and Unhinged, Drastic Action, is a solo piece and a nightmarish tour de force depicting a case of "self versus self" in a social system gone awry. Twisting and lurching, Geismar seems caught in a world of unending counterarguments and tangled bureaucracy

## **THE ARTISTS**

Jonathan Hollander founded the Battery Dance Company in 1976 and since then the company has performed throughout the U.S., Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Pacific Rim and South Asia. In 2005 the company represented the U.S. as a cultural link to Vietnam for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of normalized relations between the two countries. The company also performed in Israel, Jordan, Hungary, Poland, Malaysia and Australia. Hollander has collaborated extensively with Polish choreographers, dancers and musicians. In 2003 Poland's leading contemporary dance institution, Silesian Dance Theater, awarded him their highest honor, the Silver Mask. In 2003 the Villa Decius invited Hollander to stage a concert for the delegates of the European Conference on Tolerance in Kraków and the U.S. Embassy in Poland invited the company to perform on the opening night of their New New Yorkers Festival, the largest celebration of Polish/American culture in history. Since 1989 Aviva Geismar has been making dances that stem from her fascination with the nuances and paradoxes of human behavior. She uses an idiosyncratic kinetic language to explore the disconnect between external appearances and internal experiences. Her work is infused with anesthetic sensibility that reflects her German Jewish legacy. Geismar was featured in Dance Magazine's "25 to Watch" in 2004. Her work has been presented by Jacob's Pillow's Inside/Out series, the Millennium Stage at The Kennedy Center, Dance Theater Workshop, Symphony Space and many other venues. Commissions include Dancing in the Streets, The University of Maryland, Rutgers University and James Madison University. Geismar was an artist-in-residence at HERE Arts Center and the Djerassi Resident Artists Program.

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

Hollander, a friend of Dr. Walesch-Schneller since 1967, had followed the development of her work in Breisach over the years while he was dealing with issues of tolerance and vanishing cultural legacies in his own creative work. While attending a presentation about the Blue House in New York, he noticed the name Geismar repeatedly in the family tree of the Jews of Breisach and wondered whether his colleague Aviva Geismar was connected to the town. As it happened, Geismar's grandparents were both born in Breisach. Their son, her father, was one of the only members of his family who managed to escape the Nazis. Geismar and her father had been unaware of the work being done by the Förderverein. Drawn together by the passionate reconciliation mission of the Förderverein, these two very different artists have spent the past two and a half years building a network of support and involvement in order to realize their project.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Jonathan Hollander 212.219.3910 [jonathan@batterydance.org](mailto:jonathan@batterydance.org) [www.batterydance.org](http://www.batterydance.org)

Aviva Geismar 212.961.0963 [drasticaction@earthlink.net](mailto:drasticaction@earthlink.net) [www.drasticaction.org](http://www.drasticaction.org)

Dances for the Blue House is sponsored through grants from the City of Breisach, U.S. Embassy – Berlin, U.S. Consulate General – Frankfurt, Citigroup Germany, Körber Foundation, Landesstiftung of Baden Württemberg, 5000xZukunft, Hotel Restaurant Kapuzinergarten in Breisach, Festspiele, Volksbank Freiburg, Volksbank Breisgau Süd, Sparkasse Staufen-Breisach, Badische Staatsbrauerei Rothaus AG and 50 generous individual donors.

**For more information: [www.juedisches-leben-in-breisach.de](http://www.juedisches-leben-in-breisach.de)**

Jonathan Hollander

Artistic & Executive Director

Battery Dance Company

380 Broadway, 5th floor, New York, N.Y. 10013-3518 USA

P: +1.212.219-3910 F: +1.212.219-3911

e: [jonathan@batterydance.org](mailto:jonathan@batterydance.org)

website: [www.batterydance.org](http://www.batterydance.org)